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ABSTRACT

In 1989 Northern Arizona University established a Supported Employment Training Center (SETC) to increase the number of trained job coaches in northern Arizona and provide knowledge and skills in supported employment to personnel from cooperating schools and agencies. First-year SETC activities focused on assessment of the training needs of supported employment staff in northern Arizona service programs. Structured interviews were conducted with 52 program personnel (administrators and job coaches) and 21 employers involved with programs. The highest ranked training needs were: (1) for administrators: employee training, and job and task analysis; and (2) for job coaches: applied behavioral analysis, and job retention techniques. The topic ranked highest by cooperating employers was the job coach's relationship with employees, employers, and families, followed by job development and marketing and promoting public awareness. Job coaches had minimal or no techniques and skills that they lacked. Job coaches had minimal or no formal job coach education and limited inservice training. In addition, low salaries and lack of a career path offered little incentive to remain in the field. SETC staff used the results of the needs assessment to develop training topics, which were then offered to participants through college classroom instruction, supervised practice, teleconferencing, videotape instruction, and 1-day workshops. Recommendations are offered for a career path for supported employment personnel, involving certification and associate and bachelor degree programs. This paper contains approximately 10 references. (SV)

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Meeting Northern Arizona's Supported Employment Training Needs

In June, 1989, with guidance from Lenore Drake and Larry Powers of the Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration, Department of Economic Security, the Northern Arizona University (NAU) Supported Employment Training Center (SETC) was established. In conjunction with representatives from Pima College, staff from the NAU SETC established another SETC in Tucson. A third SETC was created at Gateway Community College in Phoenix.

The primary purpose of the NAU SETC is to increase the number of trained job coaches in northern Arizona. The SETC is also intended to increase the knowledge and skills in supported employment of personnel from cooperating programs including schools, businesses, rehabilitation facilities, Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation and Developmental Disabilities and Community Mental Health Centers.

Staff activities for the first year of the NAU SETC focused on conducting a training needs assessment and use of a wide range of training methods to provide training to supported employment personnel. These activities will be discussed within the following four sections: (a) Training Needs Assessment Methodology, (b) Training Needs Assessment Results, (c) Training Strategies and (d) Future Training Activities.

Training Needs Assessment Methodology

During August and September 1989, staff from the NAU SETC conducted an assessment of the training needs of supported employment staff involved in northern Arizona service programs. The purpose of the needs assessment was: (1) to determine immediate and long term training needs of supported employment staff; (2) to provide programs with information about training available through the SETC; and (3) to increase SETC staff awareness of supported employment activities throughout rural, northern Arizona.

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Participants in the study included Administrators of supported employment programs, Job Coach Supervisors, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Job Coaches, Public School Special Education and Vocational Education staff, and Employers with current or past involvement in supported employment. Needs assessment data was collected through face-to-face or telephone interviews with 73 respondents.

The instrument used for the interviews, The Community Training Needs Assessment, was created by SETC staff for use during this study. It is based on the adaptation and expansion of a similar instrument developed through the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitation Services. The instrument consists of four interview formats which were utilized with each of four groups of respondents (Administrators/Supervisors, Job Coaches, Employers, Educators) during on-site visits to 11 northern Arizona communities. The four interview formats facilitated data collection specific to each group's involvement in supported employment activities.

Training Needs Assessment Results

Twenty-five administrators, 19 job coaches, eight educators and 21 employers representing programs throughout northern Arizona were interviewed. The ranked responses to the 13 Likert type questions of respondents by groupings can be found in Table 1. The highest ranked training topic for administrators was **employee training and coaching** and the second highest was **job and task analysis**. Job coaches ranked first two areas: **applied behavioral analysis** and **job retention techniques**. Like administrators, educators ranked **job and task analysis** equally with **job placement** as their highest training need. By contrast, employers cited four training topics which, because of ties in ratings, represented their two highest ranks. Only one of the four topics, **applied behavioral analysis**, was identified by the other three groups. The highest ranked topic by employers was **the job coach's relationship with employees, employers and families**, followed by **job development and marketing** and **promoting public awareness of supported employment**. The most commonly stated and consistent training needs across groups related to improving working relationships with employers.

The job coaches expressed gaps in their training which were grouped into employer related and job coaching techniques. The employer related training gaps which were identified were as follows:

1. How to approach, sell, and educate employers about people with disabilities and supported employment.

2. How to educate co-workers to understand and accept people with disabilities in the work place.
3. How to enlist the cooperation of family members in supported employment activities.
4. How to directly involve employers and co-workers in the training.

Training gaps in the area of job coaching techniques were as follows:

1. Taking over jobs for clients.
2. Keeping clients busy if the job is down.
3. Inspiring clients who do not want to work.
4. Identifying strategies for clients who are stuck.
5. Promoting employee training that is real.
6. Developing support systems for clients.
7. Doing appropriate job matching.
8. Conducting unobtrusive follow-up and post placement services.
9. Organizing jobs so that others can coach.
10. Improving behavior management skills.

Several of the expressed gaps in training identified by educators were similar to those of the job coaches. They were:

1. Interagency coordination (employee, employer, coaches, educators).
2. Selling supported employment techniques to employers.
3. Matching clients with jobs.
4. Job retention skills.
5. Limited awareness of supported employment by funding sources.
6. Legal issues.
7. Behavior management on job sites.

The job coaches were asked if they expected job coaching/supported employment to be a career and 56% said yes compared to 44% who said no. The most common response given by those who said yes was that they "enjoyed the work" - "the work is fulfilling". For those who said no, the most common reasons were: (a) "want to increase professional skills in another area, i.e., counseling and vocational evaluation", and (b) "need more money". The average salary identified by the sample of job coaches was $6.31/hour with a standard deviation of $1.53/hour. The salary range was from part-time at minimum wage to $17,000 per year as a coach/case manager with five years experience.

TABLE 1

Northern Arizona University Supported Employment Training Center

Northern Arizona Training Needs

TOPIC	RANK			
	Administrators (n=25)	Coaches (n=19)	Educators (n=8)	Employers (n=21)
The Job Coach's Relationship with Employees,Employers, and Families.	3.5	4.0	4.0	1.0
Applied Behavioral Analysis	3.5	1.5	7.5	3.0
Employee Training and Coaching	1.0	4.0	7.5	6.0
Job and Task Analysis	2.0	6.5	1.5	6.0
Job Retention Techniques	5.5	1.5	4.0	8.5
Job Placement	8.0	4.0	1.5	6.0
Job Development and Marketing	5.5	9.0	7.5	3.0
Making Social and Physical Integration Opportunities Available for Employees	8.0	6.5	10.5	10.5
Promoting Public Awareness of Supported Employment	10.0	10.5	12.0	3.0
Case Management and Interagency Coordination	8.0	13.0	4.0	13.0
Knowledge of the Service System in Arizona	12.0	12.0	7.5	8.5
Philosophy and Conceptual Knowledge of Supported Employment	11.0	8.0	13.0	12.0
Legal Issues Related to Supported Employment	13.0	10.5	10.5	10.5

Training Strategies

SETC staff used the results of the needs assessment to develop training topics. In addition to meeting the needs identified in the needs assessment, other factors had to be considered. These factors included varied skill levels of the participants, the distance they would travel to attend training and the amount of time they could spend in training.

After these factors were considered, a cadre of options were offered. The training was offered through classroom instruction, supervised practice, teleconferencing, videotape instruction and one-day workshops.

Classroom Instruction: Basics of Job Coaching was offered during the Fall semester of 1989 at an undergraduate and graduate level. The purpose of the course was to increase the effectiveness of job coaches by providing a competency-based learning process based on individual mastery, to develop a resource guide of current best practices and to utilize a step-by-step instructional process that parallels client training activities of the job coach.

The students first completed a self-administered inventory of job coaching skills in order to determine their level of understanding of supported employment and skills needed by a job coach.

The students attended class one night per week and participated in discussions with local experts on different topics pertaining to job coaching. Topics included applied behavior analysis, task analysis, situational assessment and job modification, psychosocial aspects of disabilities, medical aspects of disabilities, social security and other benefit systems, history and philosophy of supported employment and job development, placement and case management.

Between classes students worked on modules and field-based experiences which were adapted from a self-study guide developed by the California Supported Employment Training Project (Leitner, 1988). The modules and field-based experiences were discussed in class. At the end of the semester students completed another inventory to check on their progress.

NAU SETC will be offering three unique summer courses. These courses will offer professionals opportunity to explore and examine daily issues and future trends pertaining to individuals with severe disabilities from middle school through adulthood.

The three courses, Transition From School to Adult Life, Adults With Developmental Disabilities in the Working Community, and Integration Issues and Strategies for Persons with Disabilities are five weeks in length and carry three graduate credit hours.

Supervised Practice: Currently, in the Spring semester of 1990 a practicum course titled Supervised Job Coaching Practice has been introduced. This

course employs cooperative instructional strategy. The cooperative instructional strategy (Anastos and Ancowitz, 1987) incorporates seven components which meet the needs of an adult learner on four levels: (a) achievement; (b) positive interpersonal relationships; (c) social support; and (d) professional self-esteem (Johnson and Johnson, 1987).

As a group, the students identify common professional development needs and divide into pairs to become peer mentors. The instructor develops background reading packets pertaining to identified needs and mails the packets to the students. The students meet to discuss the packet with the instructor and, on occasion, with a nationally recognized expert by teleconferencing. Also at these meetings, the class has a preconference to discuss the purpose of upcoming observations. Four observations will be completed by the instructor, sometimes accompanied by the participant's peer mentor. Three observations will be videotaped. The observed participant will view the tape and do self-analysis before meeting with the instructor or mentor to review the observation. At times the class will critique a tape to emphasize strengths, make suggestions and explore alternative methods. After critiques are made, the students practice new skills learned, calling upon the instructor, their peer mentors or other members of the class for professional support. The class meets every other week to discuss a new topic and begin another cycle of observations.

Teleconferences: Two teleconferences were offered during the Fall of 1989. The first was a series of five conferences pertaining to supported employment program management sponsored by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University. The second was a one-day teleconference on job development produced by the University of Wisconsin - Stout. Two more teleconferences will be offered during the spring and summer of 1990.

Videotaped Instruction: A series of videotapes which address a variety of topics pertaining to supported employment, ranging from lectures on developmental disabilities and chronic mental illness to audience discussions on business participation in supported employment, were produced by SETC staff. These tapes may be borrowed by individuals and/or groups for training.

Workshops: One-day workshops will be offered during Spring 1990. The first workshop to be developed will address the issues involved in developing supported employment training programs that meet the U.S. Department of Labor Fair Labor and Standards Act regulations. A second topic being considered is opportunities after high school for persons with severe

handicapping conditions, including the areas of education, employment, independent living and recreation.

Future Training Activities

It is clear that job coaches have from none to minimal formal job coach education and limited in-service training. There is little incentive to remain in the field because of low salaries and the lack of a career path. It is a paradox that the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct effective supported employment is so extensive. A listing of job responsibilities related to supported employment services is presented in Table 2.

Initiatives undertaken to establish a career path for supported employment personnel seem critical in order for the service delivery system to survive. Certificate training programs at community colleges would be an initial step in the direction of establishing a career path in supported employment. Associate degrees might be next on the career path continuum which would prepare individuals to work with persons with severe disabilities within a specialty area such as job coaching, independent living or transitional employment. Bachelor degree programs to prepare "Supported Life Style Specialists" might be available for individuals who would like to expand their expertise to integrate all services that assist persons with severe disabilities to integrate into society. These individuals would also be trained in management of supported employment programs including program development methods, staff supervision and evaluation, fiscal control, training and staff development.

Continuing in-service training for employers and co-workers is needed in the following areas: (a) disabling conditions, (b) attitudes toward persons with disabilities, (c) roles and responsibilities in the supported employment process, (d) financial incentives, and (e) legal issues. Continuing in-service training for educators should include: (a) legal issues, (b) staffing needs, (c) roles and responsibilities in the supported employment process, (d) interagency coordination of services, and (e) appraisal of student skills that transfer to community work settings.

TABLE 2

Northern Arizona University Supported Employment Training Center

Northern Arizona Training Needs

Job Responsibilities Related to Supported Employment Services

- ○ Vocational Appraisal
- ○ Vocational Guidance
- ○ Pre-vocational Skills
- ○ Family Guidance
- ○ Job Development
- ○ Employer/Employee Education
- ○ Job Analyses
- ○ Job Modification
- ○ Job Coaching
- ○ Work Adjustment
- ○ Job Retention
- ○ Post-employment Services
- ○ Case Management
- ○ Community Integration

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